A Single Decision (Take Two)

By: Timewatch (/u/1698214/Timewatch) (https://www.fanfiction.net/pm2/post.php?uid=1698214)

Follow/Fav

Aboard Invisible Hand, on that fateful day above Coruscant, Grievous makes a choice that causes a few little changes for the Separatists and Republic alike. [rewrite of a much older story]

Rated: Fiction T (https://www.fictionratings.com/) - English - Sci-Fi/Friendship - General Grievous, OC - Chapters: 53 - Words: 542,002 - Reviews: 1,397 (/r/11714223/) - Favs: 1,321 - Follows: 1,431 - Updated: Aug 19, 2022 - Published: Jan 4, 2016 - id: 11714223

Author's note: Apologies for the delay. My Friday could be summed up so: "And now another problem I can't ignore has appeared." But this chapter is nearly twice as long as the last one, so enjoy it.

Chapter 5

"What do you mean, you can't hand it over?" Kronaak drew himself up as tall as he could, towering over the little smooth-faced Polis Massan. "What use do you have for thirty million tons of grain?"

"W-well, Captain, we were sending it to Sluis Van-" stammered the Polis Massan.

"And that is where I wish to take it." said Kronaak. His commando droid escort stood in a half-circle behind him, their sleek, dark frames at odds with the soft environment around them. This whole asteroid base was too small for his liking, but then again, these creatures only came up to his chest.

"But- But Captain, the Republic admiral told us not to send the freighter until the world fell. Our hearts go out to the Sluissi for the suffering they endure, but we cannot risk such a precious delivery being destroyed in a premature-"

"Silence!" snapped Kronaak, stamping a leg into the floor. The Polis Massan flinched. "I have chased this grain shipment across several sectors for a day and a half, little creature; from Elrood to Terminus and back to here. My patience hangs by a thread. I am a Captain of the Confederacy of Independent Systems, the Republic's word is worth less than the dust on your asteroid to me. Furthermore, I have three million troops in orbit, against your paltry... *security.* Do you think you're in any position to negotiate?"

"No..." The Polis Massan winced as he spoke. "The Republic would have to be notified, though, we are a loyal system-"

Kronaak activated his communicator. "Commander," he said to 27, "begin landing your forces. Polis Massa is being annexed to the Confederacy."

"Roger roger." cheerily replied OOM-27, up above on *Aethra*.

"What?" squeaked the Polis Massan.

"Think of this as an opportunity, little creature. Your kind do love to help those in need, and none are in need more than the good citizens of the Confederacy who languish under Republic sieges, across the Outer Rim." Kronaak would have smiled if his mouth worked that way. "Continue your aid efforts, without the interference of bureaucracy, regulations, and *big government* tyranny."

"I- I- We will be able to continue our excavations, yes?"

"That is your right under the Articles of Secession. Systems' rights are of paramount importance to us." said Kronaak. "We will leave a small detachment behind to ensure your loyalty to the cause. Now, may I take that freighter, or do I have to start shooting?"

"Yes, you may take it to Sluis Van." The Polis Massan bowed his head in defeat.

"I'm glad this could be resolved so civilly. Best of luck to you in your... quest." Kronaak gave a polite bow, and turned to leave with his escort, claws and walking stick clicking on the floor plates. *That could have gone so much worse...* "Commander," he said into his communicator, "hold off on the full invasion. Send down a garrison only."

"Roger roger."

It took two more days for the clones to reach the Separatist base in the hills. By that time, Esera was back on her feet, though with a persisting limp. She'd learned all about Captain Tuom's people here on Shumavar; the second-comers, as the Loyalist militia called them. It was hard to admit that this conflict was too deep for her to end. If she'd been here from the start, and made sure the Republic didn't exclusively favor the first-comers, it all might have been avoided... But it was too late now. There was no trust between the two sides, there might not ever be any again.

Tuom was interested in her past too. "How does one become a Jedi?" he asked over breakfast that morning. "Do you just sign up to be taught magic?"

"Not so easy, I'm afraid." Esera said. "In *theory* anyone can learn the ways of the Force. In practice, some people are just more in tune with it than others. There's Jedi who roam the galaxy, seeking out Force-sensitive children; with their parent's permission, they're taken back to the Temple on Coruscant and trained from there. It's a great honor for them. I was three when they found me, but infants are ideal. Attachment leads to the dark side, the masters always say."

"We've had a few wizards and witches here on Shumavar. Never any Jedi until now." Tuom had a wistful look on his face. "I met one once, when I was very young. He moved things with his mind, and could heal even the worst of wounds without a scar. I asked him how he did it, and he told me that he called on the life-force of the universe... To this day, I still don't know what he meant."

"He must have been a wise man to realize that on his own." said Esera. "The Force is the energy created by all things. It's everywhere, between you, I, the trees, the hills, even the droids out there. It is a powerful ally, Master Yoda told us. We can call on it, and it calls on us."

"It still doesn't make sense to me." The Separatist captain laughed. "You know, I think you're better suited to be a mystic than the commander of an army."

"I wish." Esera sighed. "My own homeworld joined the Separatists too. I can't help but wonder what has become of it."

"Where is it?"

"The planet Stalimur, it's out in the Tion cluster, not too far from Raxus." she said. "From what I read about it when I was older, it's a very peaceful place. Not at all prepared for a war, unlike your folk here."

"Well, the Confederacy is still losing, so maybe this'll all be over before the Republic reaches it." Tuom shrugged. "Or maybe not. There's been so many ups and downs that I can't predict who will win anymore. The tide turns every six months."

One of the few droids remaining walked into the lodge. "Sir," it said, "the Republic forces are nearing. They will be here shortly."

"That's it, then." Captain Tuom stood up, and stretched. "For a long time, I feared this day. But now... I feel relieved. Like a long wait is over."

"I can't talk you into going peacefully, can I?" asked Esera, knowing very well what the answer would be.

"No can do. I'm a dead man either way. Even if your clones take me alive, once you move onto the next planet, your friends will do me in. Better to take a blaster bolt in battle than a blaster bolt in the prison camp courtyard." Tuom strapped on his helmet, and picked up his gun. "Do you sorcerers know what happens after death?"

"Our energy returns to the Force, that's what most of us believe." She too stood up now.

"That doesn't sound too bad." The Captain offered her a hand, and she shook it. "I'm glad you stopped by, lady Jedi. You were better company than this lot." He nodded at the droid standing in the doorway.

"Thank you, Captain. I found more hospitality here than I do back in my own camp." Esera looked away, letting the weariness she'd felt for months show. "I wish it didn't have to end this way."

"Everyone dies, sooner or later. Might as well do it on your own terms."

"Then may the Force be with you, Captain Tuom." she said.

"And you too, lady Jedi."

That was the last she saw of the Separatist, alive at least. He and the remaining droids went off down the road, and a few minutes later she heard the gunfire, before silence fell in the hills again. Esera walked out of the lodge, and sat down on felled log to wait. In the quiet, her thoughts turned back to everything that had happened since this war began. She and her master had been all over the galaxy; Ryloth, Brentaal IV, Jabiim, and Umbara were the places she remembered best. Now here she was on Shumavar, alone. When this wretched mess started, she'd seen it as black and white as her peers did; many padawans were excited at the prospects of a *real* war, despite their masters' teachings. Esera hadn't been excited, but she'd been willing to do her part for a righteous cause.

Learning that this war was anything but black and white had been a hard lesson. On Ryloth, she had been so sure of the justice of their cause, rescuing the Twi'leks from mechanical murderers that had invaded their world. It was the last time she'd actually felt like a Jedi, helping the defenseless and restoring peace. Later she'd hear that Senator Taa of Ryloth had been implicated in embezzling taxes from his sector. Then came her time on Brentaal IV, where she'd faced actual people in battle, and not just droids. It didn't feel right to kill them, but they took up arms against the legitimate government and forfeited any rights they had by doing so... Didn't they? Jabiim was different. She hadn't suppressed a band of rebels there, she'd fought to destroy a nation. Perhaps if Thamyris had been there, he'd have known why people with nothing to left to lose fought the hardest. Worst of all was her time on Umbara. Until then, she'd just doubted the justice of this war. After Umbara... Esera had no taste for any war, just or not.

A whole host of minor engagements and fleet actions had come between those battles, but it all blurred together. Fight after fight, slaughter after slaughter, until they reached Shumavar. *I can't do this anymore,* Esera thought. Too many of her friends had died on far-away worlds, too many innocents had been sacrificed for pointless victory, too many had perished by her hand when she should have been helping them. This was not what the Jedi were supposed to do. This was not what she was supposed to do. That left her with the question, though: *Then* what *am I supposed to do?*

Even Esera's last refuge, the Force, had become confused. Her master and the others had used to talk about how the Dark Side clouded everything, but for Esera and other Jedi her age, that was all they knew. It was as if murky water full of mud and sand had been kicked and stirred. Only in the last day had Esera become aware of it. She wondered if something had happened, somewhere. But she was young, and unlearned; if there was an answer, it was beyond her. There were greater problems for Esera to dwell on. *What am I supposed to do?* she asked herself again.

The clones finally arrived, their dusty grey and brown-mottled armor at odds with the clean white snow and evergreens around the lodge.

"General!" a clone called. "Did you save any more for us?"

"This place is deserted, trooper." said Esera.

"Good to see you alive, General." another clone said. "Though I have to wonder about the Seppie clothes."

"I didn't have much choice. It was this or freeze." Esera jumped down from the log. "They burnt all their plans and documents a few days ago. There's nothing left for us, we should get back to our own lines."

The clones insisted on taking her back to base in the AT-TE they had brought up, where their medic confirmed that she was well on her way to a full recovery. They passed by the dead Captain Tuom and his droid squad on the way down the hill.

"Form a burial detail." she ordered.

"Right away, General, but why?" asked a clone. "That was one of the enemy."

"He wasn't my enemy." Esera said. "Bury him." The clones did as told.

It was clear there'd been a clash near the Republic's forward operating center. Blackened AAT hulks dotted the streets and leveled blocks, and there were a few Republic walkers among them. Separatist dead were scattered all around, and there were dozens of droids too. "It was a suicide attack," one of the clone turret gunners said, "they didn't even have a clear strategy."

"No rhyme or reason to it." the other gunner added. "They took quite an interest in killing the local militiamen, though. Some of them even ignored us clones. Do you think it had to do with that tribal *first* and *second* business the locals have been yammering about?"

"If you ask me, they were having some kind of race war, and we weren't invited." the first gunner said. "Awfully rude not to include us."

Captain Tuom's orders had been fulfilled then, at least to a degree. Back at the mass of tents that served as base camp, her counterpart greeted her with a false warmth. "Ah, Komara, my friend! Our lost comrade returns to us!" Ardabur Aspar threw up his hands, as if he were actually glad to see her. "I think her new outfit fits her."

"General, why are you in Separatist gear?" asked Commander Thamyris.

"I didn't want to be running around in the snow in only hospital clothes." Esera gave him a scowl. "Surely, a soldier can appreciate the need to stay warm."

"Ah." Thamyris nodded. Some of the clones at base had scrubbed off the camouflage they''d applied to their armor, and were returning to the white and red they'd landed in. "You may be interested to hear the east city is no longer a problem, General."

"Indeed." Aspar said. "With you off on an adventure with the enemy, and a surprise offensive from the south, the Governor and I decided to just bomb the whole place into the ground. The war on Shumavar is all but over. Only a handful of other cities still resist."

It took her a moment to realize what he said. "You *what?*"

"It's just as I said, General, many of the other holdout cities surrendered this morning, once they heard about what happened here." Thamyris said.

Esera buried her face in her hands. *From bad to worse...* "And what about the others that didn't surrender?" she asked, fearing she already knew what the answer was.

"I've given the order to have them destroyed from orbit." Aspar stated. "Another Separatist rebellion crushed. It won't be long before the rest of the Atravis sector follows."

"You understand that I have to inform our superiors of this, don't you?" she asked. This was a step too far. She could not stand by and do nothing in good conscience while her allies sowed wanton destruction like they were competing with General Grievous.

"There is no need." said Aspar, waving a hand dismissively. "We have approval from the highest level of authority on this front." He produced a datapad, and showed her the signatures on the bombing orders. There was Aspar, the two clone commanders, and then one from Admiral Bannidge Holt, the Commander-in-Chief of this theater of the war, a man recently appointed by Palpatine himself, bypassing the Jedi Council completely. "As you see, Komara, our actions are completely legal. By the end of the day, we will have brought peace to Shumavar, and ended this destructive conflict. There may be casualties now, but in the long run, more lives have been saved by our actions than yours, as much of an idealist as you may be."

Esera turned away without another word, and sought out the tent she kept her meager belongings in. Once back in Jedi robes instead of Separatist militia fatigues, she got far fewer strange looks. But what Aspar was going to do would not leave her mind. The Jedi did not bomb thousands of innocent people just to make a point! That was barbaric, that was something Grievous would do, they should have been above this... She, at least, *was* above this. Esera would be no better than Aspar if she just stood by and let them do as they pleased. Long ago, her master had told her that all it took for evil to triumph was for good people to do nothing. She'd already stood by and done nothing once.

Her only choice was clear, then. Within the hour, Esera was on a shuttle up to the *Venator* in orbit.

The Republic fleet was already starting to fall back, and Grievous and his task force had only arrived an hour ago. To his ire, *Invisible Hand* had to sit at the back of the fleet, having taken substantial damage in the Coruscant raid. Instead, he'd sent another *Providence*-class cruiser to lead the attack, a certain *Morning Star.* Where it got such a ridiculous name, he had no idea. He'd long since concluded only a few people in this war knew how to give a ship a legitimately threatening name.

Far ahead, Grievous saw the two arms of his fleet converging on the star destroyers. Three battleships and their escorts pounded away at the enemy from range, while *Morning Star* led destroyers and frigates on a flanking maneuver that would push the Republic out of orbit. Just as planned. Whoever was in charge of that Loyalist fleet wasn't too creative, or confident, because their star destroyers began to turn tail at the first sign of *Morning Star*'s attack.

The captain of *Morning Star* contacted him, and his hologram blinked up beside Grievous on the bridge. "General, we have them on the run." reported the human, saluting. He wore a well-trimmed beard and a sharp uniform; one from his home world, no doubt, because there was no Confederate-issued uniform.

"Pursue them until they retreat into hyperspace." Grievous ordered. "Let the tremble."

"As you command, sir." The hologram shut off.

"Who is he?" Grievous asked to his own Captain.

"That is Captain Eemon, sir." said Dofine.

"Eemon? *That* Eemon?" Grievous wasn't sure if he was impressed or skeptical. He'd only met the man once, and all he remembered of him was how *he* had charmed Dooku and gotten promises out of him. It was usually the other way around... "Eemon supplied us with our gunships for the raid, but I didn't know he was in my fleet. Doesn't he have a planet to rule?"

"That would be Ado Eemon, sir, Warlord of Caramm. This is his son, Ricimer Eemon, Captain of *Morning Star*." Dofine explained. "I had my suspicions of his presence here, it was Dooku's doing, but he is holding his own."

"Then he is doing his duty by executing my plan perfectly." said Grievous. "It is refreshing to have more than a few competent commanders. Fighting for the Republic must be like this!"

"They'll need to return to their own fleets soon enough, sir," reminded Dofine, "or our other efforts will suffer for their absence."

"And then it's back to the nightmare of droids..." An idea came to him, though. "But now that I rule the Confederacy, I can order whatever I please... finding better officers included!"

"I do not mean to disrespect you, General," Dofine said, "but you do not rule the Confederacy, legally speaking. You have not been affirmed by Congress."

Grievous blinked once, and coughed. *Congress?* He'd heard mention of such a thing in passing, before, though he never though it important. Before Geonosis, he could remember watching the live sessions of the Republic's Senate with Dooku; Dooku had droned on and on about the corruption and graft and incompetent bureaucracy to his soon-to-be allies. Grievous had thought it all trite, and assumed the so-called Confederate Congress to be the same thing with a new name. "If they know what's best for them, they'll recognize my authority without question."

Dofine didn't respond, and Grievous turned his focus back to the battle at hand. The Eemon boy was doing well, wreaking havoc on the Republic's left flank as they pulled away from Sluis Van's gravity well. Grievous knew his own plans were excellent in their quality, but his underling's ability to execute them was almost always lacking. Not today, though.

"New contacts coming out of hyperspace, sir." a pilot droid reported. Finally, some action for *Invisible Hand!* Unless- "They're our own, sir." the droid went on.

"Ah, the crab-man returns." Grievous clasped his hands together. "Hail him."

The hologram of Kronaak flickered into being. Just seeing him made Grievous want to grit teeth that were no longer there. Kronaak stood on six legs, like a spider, and though he only showed two of his arms, Grievous knew there was another pair more hiding under his robe. His mouth was worse of all, mandibles and a mass of feelers constantly twitching; and above, four shiny eyes, devoid of any emotion. Grievous clenched and unclenched a fist, something about the crab-man's visage triggered a deep anger in him. Kronaak would need to prove his people's worth, Grievous knew that for sure, at least.

"General," the crab-man said, saluting, "I have completed my mission."

"I expected nothing less." Grievous replied, checking his internal clock. Kronaak had made it with half an hour to spare. "What do you bring?"

"In my journey I gathered nearly the entire monthly fruit export of the Elrood sector, and hunted down this month's grain harvest from the Kallea sector and beyond, thirty million tons in all." Kronaak answered, standing straight and proud.

"That should hold these serpents over." said Grievous.

"Furthermore, sir," the crab-man went on, "I have annexed Polis Massa and the Subterrel sector to the Separatist cause."

Any other general might have sputtered at such a radical action, but not Grievous. "On what grounds?" asked he, curious at the unexpected development.

"They would not hand over the grain shipment, as they claimed to be a part of the Republic. I saw no other option but to rid them of that problem."

"A solution to my liking." Grievous allowed himself a small laugh. Could it be that he had discovered two useful commanders in one day? "You have served me well, crab-man. Stand by, you will receive word when it is time to land the cargo."

"As you command, sir." The hologram turned off, and Grievous could see a *Lucrehulk* with escorts and one *incredibly* large freighter approaching on the sensor readout. He wondered how much space thirty million tons actually took up...

"It's rather unusual to take a one-seventy out alone." said the clone deck officer aboard *Avenger*, the lone star destroyer in Shumavar's orbit. "Not that I'm one to deny a Jedi."

"Just get the ship ready to go." Esera said. "I've got a… secret mission."

"Will do, General." The officer saluted, before waving over two of his men. They'd have the ARC-170 cleared fly in short order. And Esera was going to need that ship, very quickly, once Aspar found out what she was going to do.

This was treason, there was no getting around it. Sabotaging Republic war material was a high crime, and one that would have her sentenced by military tribunal, or just "detained" indefinitely by current laws. *If* she got caught, that was. Esera would have smirked, but she had very little to smile about lately. When it came down to it, it was better to commit treason then let heinous crimes go unchallenged under her watch. Doing the *right* thing wasn't always doing the *legal* thing, her master had taught her. Now it was time put that into practice.

Once her work aboard *Avenger* was complete, Esera returned to the hangar. "Am I cleared, trooper?"

"Yes, General." said the clone, waving to the ARC-170. "She's all yours. We'll have an astromech up here in a moment for you."

"Good." A hint of worry twinged in her. The longer she stayed on the star destroyer, the more likely it was that her plot would be discovered. Minutes passed by, and everything continued as normal. *How long is it going to take them to notice?* she wondered. Finally, the astromech arrived.

"This is R8-M5, one of our better performers." the clone said. R8 beeped a greeting.

"Very good." Esera said, barely stopping herself from rushing into the fighter. "Well, if that'll be all, I'd like to get going."

"Of course, General. Good luck on whatever mission you're on." The clone saluted again, and went off about his business. A ceiling crane guided R8-M5 into the astromech socket, and some deck crewmen removed the fuel lines and landing strut braces. Everything looked like it was turning out fine-

And then the alarms sounded.

"*Now* they figure it out..." Esera muttered, climbing into the ARC-170, and warming up its engines. "R8, take us out." she ordered. The droid chirped, and the fighter rose off the deck.

"General Komara," a voice, probably a bridge officer's, asked on intercom, "I think there's been a terrible mistake. It seems someone's locked down the weapons grid with your authorization code!"

"Oh." said Esera, before a second line opened up. She could feel her heat beating faster and faster.

"Komara!" *That* voice was Aspar's. "What have you done?!" Esera sealed the canopy, and guided the ARC-170 out of its bay. Aspar must have been watching her actions from the surface, because he spoke again, moving into the same channel as the first speaker: "Don't let her escape!"

"Escape?" asked the first voice. "What's happening? Why would General Komara disable our weaponry?"

"She's a Separatist!" Aspar spat, his fury felt even through the com. "She's been plotting against us the whole time! She's even sent our strike coordinates to the enemy cities down here!"

"I am following the Jedi way, Aspar." said Esera. "I won't become a murderer, like you!"

"See?" asked Aspar to the bridge officer. "She even talks like their propagandists! Komara's been turned, she's a traitor, just like I thought! Disable that ship, bring her in!"

"Yes, sir." said the bridge officer. As Esera's fighter rushed out of the landing bay, she spotted a pair of patrolling V-wings already coming after her. They opened fire as soon as they closed range, but the ARC's shields held firm.

"R8, calculate the jump to Terminus." she said. "Engage as soon as you're clear." A series of whistles came from R8 in affirmation.

"You can't get away with this, Komara!" shouted Aspar over the intercom. "I will find you, and I will bring you to justice!"

Esera wished she had a snappy reply like a holovid hero would say, or a statement that would justify her actions. But instead, she just shut off the line. Aspar could rant about the end justifying the means all he wanted, but at least the people in the cities now had time to escape the coming orbital strikes. She'd fulfilled her duty as a Jedi. R8 reported the hyperdrive was ready, and off Esera went, to the edge of civilization.

"See?" Nute Gunray said to his fellow councilors, pointing at the holoscreen on the conference room's wall. "Another victory, just like I thought." The most prominent news services on the Confederate shadowfeeds, at least the ones present on Sluis Van, had their cameras out in force today.

"...For those just joining us, General Grievous has attacked the Republic's blockade over Sluis Van, and broken the orbital siege entirely." spoke a Sluissi reporter, standing on the edge of some spaceport. Landing ships cast their shadows on her and everyone else around, flying low. "Our analysts have concluded that this is the same task force that struck Coruscant a few days ago, based on the markings on prominent cruisers and battleships spotted there. While ground forces still remain, the new reinforcements will be able to halt their advance entirely."

The camera moved, away from the reporter and onto an unobstructed view of the runway itself, which was crowded with C-9979 landers. Their cargo was not droids, but sacks and crates. "As has been reported for some time now, starvation has broken out here on Sluis Van. The Khedive himself has fallen ill, living on the same meager rations as the common populace. We see here a massive relief effort underway, only possible thanks to the General's arrival."

"*Empty posturing*." said Shu Mai, in her Gossam tongue. "*He is just gaining popular support before he announces Dooku is dead.*"

"I didn't think that brute was capable of thinking so subtlety..." Passel Argente mused.

"Gunray, didn't you say this war would be lost if Grievous ever took charge?" asked Po Nudo, looking smug.

"I said no such thing!" The Viceory protested. "I have always been loyal to our leaders."

"Yes, now is the time for loyalty!" Wat Tambor agreed. "Unity through loyalty, victory through unity!"

The holoscreen changed to footage of Grievous himself, standing with the Sluissi Khedive on a balcony, with an assortment of officers with him. One was a spindly crustacean creature, almost as tall as the cyborg, another was a sharp-looking young human male. Both of them carried scepters, for some reason. *Even Mar Tuuk has one now,* Gunray noted. He'd have to look into that.

"Though the General has customarily not made himself available for any comments, the Khedive announced earlier that he had known of this operation in advance. He acknowledged that the relief supplies would not be enough to impact rationing yet, but also promised that more was on the way, with no Republic ships to shoot down attempted mercy-missions." The camera cut back to the reporter by the runway. "The events here at Sluis Van today are believed by some to be the next phase of the war. Despite the reversals in the Core and Inner Rim, it is evident that raw numbers are no match for General Grievous's strategic cunning and tactical genius. The Confederacy is nowhere close to defeat, as we see here today, just a week after our counterparts on Holonet News claimed the war would be over in a few months."

"How the tables turn." Tambor chuckled.

"Still, there is one question that everyone has been asking: *where is Dooku?* His primary aide, Shaala Doneeta, has been declining to comment since the battle of Coruscant. Given the recent victories, though, citizens of the Confederacy should have no cause for alarm. It is evident that the war goes smoothly even with the Count's current absence from the public eye. This is Seka Yuva, regional correspondent for Raxus Today." Gunray turned off the holoscreen.

"Perhaps we are not doomed after all." remarked Po Nudo.

"We were never doomed!" said Tambor, standing up and holding a fist to his chest. "This is evidence that our cause is divinely sanctioned! Never has there been a more righteous-"

"*I almost forgot you Skakoans still believed in that religious nonsense of yours.*" Shu Mai said, rolling her eyes.

"Silence, treacherous infidel!" snapped Tambor. "Your mouth is going to get you killed one day, and I am going to be there laugh as you are cast into eternal damnation."

"*There is no divine sanction, there is no righteous cause. We are still losing this war, and two surprise attacks do not change the tide. Are there any here who still have homes to return to? Are there any here who have seen a single scrap of the riches we were promised?*" Shu Mai went on.

"She is right, all we've gained from this venture is empty coffers." said San Hill. "Besides, Grievous wants my head, I don't see this ending well at all!"

"Kooriva is fallen, and I am nearly penniless." Argente agreed. "This has turned out to be a bad deal, to put it lightly."

"Ando too," said Po Nudo, "but can we not retake these once we break the sieges here in the Outer Rim?"

"*Even if Grievous can chase the Republic out, we will never be able to push beyond. Their forces are too superior and too numerous, and upgrading ours any further will see us all bankrupt!*" Shu Mai grumbled. "*What about you Tikkes? Have you gotten anything we were promised?*"

"Huh?" Tikkes sat up with a start, in the corner he'd been sitting in the whole time. "I've been living on Dooku's charity since the Republic took Dac, I don't know why he kept me around."

"*See? We have gotten nothing!*"

"Enough!" Gunray stood up. "I do not like what I am hearing. Nemoidia and its purse-worlds are occupied as well, but you do not see me ready to give up!"

"Skako resists." Tambor folded his arms, and leaned back in his chair. He must have been smirking under that pressure suit mask.

"Shut up." ordered Gunray. "I will hear no more of this. It is the path to treason!"

"Technically, we have already committed treason by betraying the Republic." pointed out Argente.

"*Treason to the Separatist cause, he means.*" Poggle spoke, in a bored series of honks and croaks. The Geonosian language was irritating to Nemoidian ears, and Gunray's patience was already wearing thin. If this lot didn't fall into line soon...

"You were Grievous's leading critic before all this, Gunray." said San Hill. "Now you practically worship the ground he walks on!"

"*Now that Dooku is dead, he probably fancies himself second in command.*" Shu Mai gave him a glare.

"And why should I not be? The Trade Federation has committed more to this war than any other-"

"Except the Techno Union." interrupted Tambor.

"The entire shadowfeed network is hosted by my ships!" San Hill said. "Without them, we would have no communications."

"Do not forget who is routing those communications!" Po Nudo too stood up now, pointing an accusing finger at the Banking Clan chairman. "Your ships are nothing but relays, we process the information!"

And then the entire Separatist Council descended into a chaos of shouting. It was the normal way these meetings had ended for the last six months.

Later that day, Nute Gunray returned to his quarters and finished compiling everything had learned about Lord Sidious, and sent it off to Grievous with little fanfare. He took off his mitre and slumped down in his seat. Shu Mai was right about one thing, even with two surprise victories, the Confederacy was losing. If Grievous didn't act soon, the Council would take matters into their own hands, most likely, and he'd go down with them. He more than anyone else knew Grievous did not react well to insults, and was prone to killing first, asking questions later. When it came down to the Council versus Grievous, Gunray would have to choose his side wisely.

After much thought, he made his decision. All he had to do now was wait for the others to make theirs.

Author's additional notes: I'm pretty sure that this chapter was supposed to end on Esera's second part, but apparently I moved the Gunray scene up from chapter 6. I'll trust my past judgment and say it's for the best, though I don't know why.

< Prev | 5. Chapter 5: Important Choices | Next >

Name:

Type your review for this chapter here...

Post Review

Actions Share Follow/Favorite